

# STAYING TRUE LEE'S JEET

INTERVIEW BY PAUL BAX

Besides James Lee (deceased) and Dan Inosanto, Ted Wong is the only student certified by Bruce Lee in his art of Jeet Kune Do. Wong has kept a low profile for many years and has only recently emerged to teach JKD as it was taught to him by Bruce Lee. With the growing confusion as to what JKD consists of, Wong has finally become more available to the public through seminars and video tapes. The martial arts community has come to think JKD was compiled of Kali and Silat or created from twenty six different arts. Besides dispelling these rumors, Wong openly comments on the confusion in JKD and how Bruce Lee would feel about how JKD has been taught over the years. The late James Lee is also discussed, as is the unfortunate passing of Brandon Lee. Furthermore, he explains what JKD is and more importantly, what it is not.



BAX: WHEN AND HOW DID YOU MEET BRUCE LEE AND WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST IMPRESSION OF HIM?

**TED WONG:** I first met him in 1966, but I didn't get to know him until 1967 when he opened his Los Angeles Chinatown school. He impressed me quite a bit even before I met him, since I used to watch, "The Green Hornet." When I got to know him was when he first opened his school. He gave a demonstration and a lecture. I was impressed with his technique and his philosophy.

BAX: HOW LONG DID YOU TWO TRAIN TOGETHER?

**TW:** I trained with him for almost five years, from 1967 to 1972.

BAX: WHAT WERE SOME OF THE INNOVATIONS BRUCE MADE IN JKD BEFORE HE DIED?

**TW:** The bottom line was to make the

technique simple and direct. The changes were kind of gradual and subtle. He always tried to improve his art and make it better. I think the major changes in 1971 and '72 were probably the fact he incorporated more kicking into the art, and also more speed in closing the gap.

**BAX: WHAT ASPECTS OF COMBAT DID HE EMPHASIZE MOST TO YOU?**

**TW:** Probably judging distance and footwork. He always emphasized that the most important thing was footwork and judging distance. Last came the technique.



**BAX: WHAT WAS IT LIKE SPARRING BRUCE LEE?**

**TW:** He was so quick and he could judge distance so good. Even if he was standing real close to you, you still couldn't touch him at all. I learned a lot from just sparring with him. You had to give one hundred percent and you had to learn to move quick every time you sparred him.

**BAX: SINCE YOU WERE HIS CLOSE COMPANION DID YOU SEE BRUCE IN ANY STREET FIGHTS?**

**TW:** I never did. I never saw him in any street confrontations.

**BAX: DID BRUCE LEE FEEL THAT JEET KUNE DO WAS ONLY A CONCEPT OR AN ACTUAL MARTIAL ART?**

**TW:** It's more of an actual art. It was his philosophy and his lifetime's work. To me, it is an actual art, it is a philosophy. It is a part of Bruce's life, his creation.

**BAX: DO YOU THINK LEE WOULD BE UPSET BY THE WAY JEET KUNE DO HAS BEEN TAUGHT OVER THE YEARS?**

**TW:** I think he probably would be.

**BAX: WHAT WAS IT THAT MADE YOU COME OUT AND SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON JEET KUNE DO?**

**TW:** I don't think I'm trying to set the record straight. After Bruce passed away

many of his students went their own separate ways and I have tried to stay true to Bruce's teachings, his philosophies and his principles. I try to perpetuate what he had taught me and what he had developed in his art. After Bruce passed away his Jeet Kune Do went into different directions. I think it is important that people taught by Bruce Lee remain true to his art, remain loyal to him and teach it the way he developed his art.

**BAX: WHEN INSTRUCTORS USE THE TERM, JKD "CONCEPTS" DOES THAT CAUSE CONFUSION?**

**TW:** I think JKD "concepts" are pretty universal. Any martial artist can use them but if a martial artist is using JKD concepts and practices a martial art and calls it JKD I think it will cause confusion.

**BAX: DO YOU FEEL THERE SHOULD BE A NEW GOVERNING BODY IN JKD AND IF SO, WOULD YOU PLAY A PART IN IT?**

**TW:** The "JKD Society" still exists but it has been downsized. They try to promote special events for Bruce Lee, like his star on the Hollywood "WALK OF FAME," and more recently, they are trying to get Bruce Lee on a U.S. postage stamp. Recently there has been a group called, "The JKD Fellowship." It is the first and second JKD generation students. We try to get together, share our knowledge, and work together to perpetuate the art. I think what is important is that we all should get along.



**BAX: HAS ANYONE CRITICIZED YOU FOR TEACHING JKD AS IT WAS TAUGHT TO YOU?**

**TW:** So far I haven't received any criticism.

**BAX: DID YOU ACCOMPANY BRUCE LEE TO HIS**

# TO BRUCE KUNE DO

## VISITS WITH JAMES LEE?

**TW:** I traveled with Bruce up to Oakland quite a bit. For a couple of years we went up there quite regularly. It was like a fun trip and at the same time we got to know and workout with some of the students.

## BAX: COULD YOU GIVE ME SOME INSIGHT INTO JAMES LEE?

**TW:** James was a very out going guy and real straight forward. He was a lot like Bruce in the sense he liked to tell jokes and laugh. Every time we got together it was a lot of fun and a relaxed atmosphere. James was a knowledgeable martial artist in his own right. Since he came from another style, Bruce really opened up his thinking about the martial arts. James was very innovative because of his training equipment. In fact, he created and made a lot of the equipment that he and Bruce used in training.



**BAX: OVER THE YEARS PEOPLE HAVE COME TO THINK THE ARTS OF KALI AND SILAT PLAYED A BIG PART IN JEET KUNE DO. DID BRUCE EVER MENTION THAT JKD HAD EITHER OF THESE ARTS IN IT?**

**TW:** No, Bruce Lee did not mention to me that Jeet Kune Do had any Kali or Silat in it.

## BAX: WHAT ASPECT OF JKD DO YOU WANT THE PUBLIC TO KNOW ABOUT MOST?

**TW:** Well, probably Bruce Lee's philosophy in the martial arts and the way he trained. The way he looked at martial arts is probably different than a lot of other people. I think he stressed simplicity, directness and being nonclassical.

## BAX: DO YOU THINK BRUCE LEE'S, "THE TAO OF JEET KUNE DO" IS REPRESENTATIVE OF HIS ACTUAL ART?

**TW:** I think it represents a big part of it, but not completely. Mostly, it is just his philosophy and his personal notes. Actually it's more like a diary, with notes on different arts. I do know that some people thought

that whatever was in the book would represent entirely what he was practicing. He liked to draw, and anytime he saw something new he would put it in a drawing. Some people see that book and think he incorporated all these arts into JKD, when actually that's not it.



## BAX: DID HE EVER LEAVE YOU AN OUTLINE TO FOLLOW IN JKD?

**TW:** No, I think his art changed gradually so he never outlined it, but I think earlier he did have an outline. In fact, somebody came across a letter that dated back in 1965 which Bruce sent to James Lee. So, at that time he had outlined his system which consisted of Wing Chun, Boxing and Fencing. I think over the years it has pretty much followed that direction, through the late sixties and early seventies although, Wing Chun had been gradually phasing out.

## BAX: HOW MUCH GRAPPLING DID BRUCE TEACH?

**TW:** He did not teach much grappling at the time, although he developed some techniques for quick take downs but not for wrestling to the ground. He still had some work to do in the grappling area, but then again I think he didn't want to go into grappling because of his size. If you are big and over 200 pounds then grappling would be more for you. I think to him, he'd rather stay outside, but he still did some grappling at the time.

## BAX: WHAT WAS FENCING'S CONNECTION TO JEET KUNE DO?

**TW:** The footwork came from Fencing, as did the straightline principles and bridging the gap. Fencing really fit into his technique.

## BAX: DID BRUCE EVER TELL YOU THAT JEET KUNE DO WAS AN ACCUMULATION OF 26 OR 27

## DIFFERENT ARTS?

**TW:** Bruce Lee never mentioned it to me.

## BAX: IF JEET KUNE DO IS TO SURVIVE BY THE YEAR 2000-WHAT STEPS HAVE TO BE TAKEN?

**TW:** I think the first step is to establish some physical and conceptual standard that fully represents Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do as purely and accurately as possible. This way Jeet Kune Do can be taught consistently so that any confusion can be clarified.

## BAX: BEFORE BRUCE LEE DIED, DID HE GIVE INSTRUCTIONS NOT TO TEACH JKD OR NOT TO PROFIT FROM IT?

**TW:** He never laid out any rules or policies of what to do. He taught very few people. As long as he was alive he didn't want his art to become commercialized. After he passed away I stayed true to his beliefs. Only in the last few years have I started teaching. I think it is really important for the art to be taught to the public to survive.

## BAX: WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST THOUGHTS ON THE DEATH OF BRANDON LEE?

**TW:** I was shocked. I couldn't believe something like this could happen to the family again. It's really an unfortunate thing. Linda is a very strong person. She went through many difficult times. After all these years people still ask her about Bruce. Finally things started to settle down and she had her own life, but now it has happened again.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Paul Bax is a free-lance writer and JKD practitioner who publishes a newsletter called, "The Jun Fan Journal" which consists of information entirely devoted to Bruce Lee and JKD. For more information send a self addressed stamped envelope to: JFJ, 4728 East Swaller, Imperial, MO 63052.



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